

Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

Witness Statement

Utah Commissioner of Agriculture and Food
Cary G. Peterson
Statements regarding 2001 Mormon crickets and grasshopper infestation
before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands
July 19, 2001

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee Mr. Chairman. I am Cary Peterson, the State of Utah's Commissioner of Agriculture and Food.

My family and I have been in the cattle business all our lives, and I am a former Utah legislator.

I am here on behalf of the people of Utah to request that Congress appropriately fund USDA APHIS's insect control program.

That program exhausted its funds in 1999, and as a result there is no program in place to prevent the millions of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers from migrating from their hatching grounds on federal land onto valuable croplands and into populated areas.

Public health and safety are now threatened, as the previous witnesses have explained. Utah Governor Michael Leavitt formed a subcabinet-level Task Force of State Health, Environment and Transportation Departments to investigate the health and human safety risks of this infestation. The need for your help is great. The infestation triggered a declaration of Agricultural Emergency on June 4th, 2001, by Governor Leavitt. Following that action...and with the authority of Utah law...(4-35-3 UCA) I activated a Decision and Action Committee comprised of federal, state, local, and private interests to address the infestation. I draw your attention to U.S. Code, Title 7, Section 148f paragraph (d). It establishes a framework for the transfer of funds to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for Mormon cricket and grasshopper control.

According to a provision of that act; after receiving a request by an affected state,

"...the Secretary of Agriculture shall immediately treat Federal, State or private lands that are infested by grasshoppers or Mormon crickets at levels of economic infestation..."

I have included the text of that entire section in the packet I gave you.

We've had crickets and grasshopper infestations in the past, but not to this extreme.

Currently there are more than 1.5 million acres infested with crickets and grasshoppers. That represents nearly 2,400 square miles. That's larger than the state of Delaware. We estimate that crop damage this year

will approach \$25 million in Utah alone.

Without consistent and systematic treatment, the problem cannot be controlled.

I draw your attention to these large photographs we have here. At times our highways are thick with crickets, posing a traction problem for vehicles. In many areas there are acre-upon-acre...mile-upon-mile... where there are 40 to 50 crickets or grasshoppers per square yard.

Our State Department of Transportation acknowledges the potential safety hazard associated with the high number of crickets and grasshoppers on our roads.

The insects also destroy valuable forage used by wildlife as well as livestock. The Utah Legislature has allocated additional funding to our department for insect control on State and private lands. But 3 out of every 4 acres in Utah are federally owned. And most of the insects hatch on federal land. Our State's Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee heard powerful testimony recently regarding the health and human safety aspects of the infestations, as well as the economic losses.

The committee instructed our Attorney General's office to investigate any legal action against the USDA to recoup losses caused by the insects.

Mr. Chairman, I recommend the following: That congress fund the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's insect control program (APHIS) at \$8.7 million for FY 2002. Of that figure, \$3.7 million would be an on-going base for infrastructure and annual operating expenses. And \$5 million would go into a "no-year" fund for emergencies for Western states. I also seek \$100,000 from FY 2001 funds for each of the Utah offices of the BLM, USFS and USDA-APHIS. These funds would be used immediately for insect assessment and control as well as for the completion of environmental assessments. The old adage, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" fits well here. For every dollar we spend in prevention, we save American tax payers many times that amount in federal disaster payments to farmers and ranchers. I would like to conclude by playing a video-tape of the crickets in our state. This video was taken by news crews for the **NBC Today Show** and for **ABC's World News Tonight** programs. Since our outbreak several weeks ago, we have received world-wide attention. Including; The BBC in London, England; GMTV in London, England; The German News Service; German Television; as well as the New York Times. Public awareness of this issue is very high in Utah, and we look to you for leadership in finding a solution.

Thank you for your time.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Attachments:

USDA-APHIS grasshopper infestation acreage

USDA-APHIS Mormon cricket infestation acreage

State of Utah Synopsis of insect infestation year 1997-2000

U.S. Code Title 7 Sec. 148f

Mormon Cricket and Grasshopper

Utah Acres Infested

1991 - 2000



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